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TAGS: PGOV PTER PINR CH CB LA VM
SUBJECT: SENIOR OFFICIAL DISCUSSES TERRORISM CONCERNS

CLASSIFIED BY: Seth Winnick, Consul General , CONGEN HCMC, State Department.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (c), (d)

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¶1. (S/NF) GVN and Communist Party advisor Vo Viet Thanh told Poloff that the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) is concerned about what it sees as new external efforts to radicalize Vietnam's Muslim community. (Numbering between 50 and 80 thousand, Vietnam's Muslims are centered in the coastal provinces of Binh Thuan and Ninh Thuan, HCMC, and in the Mekong Delta province of An Giang.) Thanh, former mayor of HCMC and a retired three-star MPS general, continues to play an active advisory role within the GVN and the Party.

¶2. (S/NF) Thanh said that the MPS has detected an uptick in "Muslims from the Middle East (NFI)" offering charitable projects to the Vietnamese Muslim community. These individuals have not declared an association to a particular charitable group. At the same time, an increasing number of Vietnamese Muslims have been traveling to Thailand for study with the Muslim community there. These individuals tend to go as tourists, so it is very difficult for the GVN to control their movements or learn what it is that they are doing, Thanh said. At the same time, other Vietnamese Muslims are returning from trips to the Persian Gulf with "lots of cash" to build new mosques and other activities. The police also have detected a "surge in cooperation" -- including financial ties -- between the Vietnamese Muslim community and Muslim congregations in Europe. It is virtually impossible for the GVN to stop the flow of money into Vietnam, be it for religious or other purposes, Thanh said.

¶4. (S/NF) The GVN is watching closely Muslim smuggling/trading rings based in Binh Thuan and Ninh Tuan that are affiliated by family and religion to others in northeast Cambodia and Thailand. In the north, the GVN is battling with criminal gangs based in China to "retain control of the border." Drug gangs have penetrated the police and government in provinces along the Chinese border, Thanh said. Other gangs in China have made "supercopies" of Vietnamese polymer banknotes and are smuggling them into Vietnam. From an anti-terrorist perspective, the GVN's fear is that such routes could be used to import more than just contraband, drugs and counterfeit money into Vietnam.

15. (S/NF) The GVN has taken some steps in response, Thanh said. MPS Minister Le Hong Anh has ordered that the GVN reject NGO or charitable proposals with a Middle Eastern pedigree. The immigration police are under standing orders to deny visa extensions from any individual from the Middle East.

16. (S/NF) Thanh noted that perhaps the biggest Vietnamese concern was with Cambodia. Muslims in An Giang cross the border on a routine basis and the MPS is aware of Muslim radicals that are operating inside Cambodia. Pressed for more information about which groups are operating in Cambodia, Thanh said that he was not aware of the details and that the USG needed to consult with the MPS Minister. He noted that the GVN believes that the senior Cambodia leadership is too corrupt and venal to prevent Muslim radicals from operating there.

17. (S/NF) PolOff told Thanh that he was not aware of how much of this information had been shared already with Embassy Hanoi, but it would be worthwhile to compare specifics on an issue of mutual concern and interest. Thanh said that he would recommend that the MPS provide the USG with the information, such as the names of those individuals seeking to establish charitable foundations in Vietnam to the USG, for background checks.

WINNICK